

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
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AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
USMISSION USNATO
AMCONSUL GOTEBORG BY POUCH

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, SW
SUBJECT: SWEDEN: OUTLOOK FOR 1977

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. THE CLOSE OF THE "FIRST 100 DAYS" OF THE FALLDIN GOVERNMENT IN SWEDEN HAS PROVOKED A GOOD DEAL OF SUM-TOTALLING AND OUTLOOK-ASSESSING. OUTSIDERS HAVE EXPRESSED SOME SURPRISE THAT AFTER 44 YEARS OF SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT, THE NON-SOCIALIST COALITION HAS EFFECTED SO LITTLE CHANGE. KNOWLEDGEABLE SWEDES HAVE NOT BEEN SURPRISED, KNOWING HOW REMARKABLY BROAD THE POLITICAL CONSENSUS IS IN SWEDEN. SWEDISH ATTENTION HAS BEEN FOCUSED RATHER--AND IN AN INCREASINGLY MELANCHOLY WAY--ON THE DIFFICULTIES AHEAD IN 1977 FOR THEIR

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FINELY-TUNED ECONOMY. LOOKING TO THE YEAR AHEAD, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL COPE HANDILY ENOUGH WITH ITS POLITICAL CHALLENGES, BUT WE BELIEVE SUCCESS FOR EVERYONE IN 1977 WILL BE MEASURED PREDOMINATELY BY HOW WELL THE ECONOMY DOES. THIS PREOCCUPATION SHOULD KEEP THE GOVERNMENT TURNED INWARD--ITS NATURAL INCLINATION IN ANY EVENT, ESPECIALLY AS COMPARED WITH THE PREDECESSOR

GOVERNMENT UNDER PALME--AND SHOULD SERVE TO BROADEN
THE AREAS OF POTENTIAL COOPERATION WITH THE US. END SUMMARY

2. THE SWEDISH PRESS MARKED THE CLOSE OF PRIME MINISTER THORBJORN FALLDIN'S "FIRST 100 DAYS" WITH THE REQUISITE ANALYSES, BUT NO EDUCATED OBSERVER WAS SURPRISED AT FINDING FEW DIFFERENCES WITH THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PREDECESSOR-- WHETHER ONE SPEAKS OF THE BUDGET, OR FOREIGN POLICY, OR DAY-TO-DAY MANAGEMENT OF GOVERNMENT. ON THE POLITICAL SIDE, THE THREE-PARTY COALITION'S PRINCIPAL CHALLENGE WAS TO LEARN TO RUN A THREE-PARTY COALITION: AND SINCE SURVIVAL DEPENDED ON IT, THEY HAVE LEARNED FAST, AND NO ONE EXPECTS THEM TO FAIL. ON THE ECONOMIC SIDE, HOWEVER, FALLDIN AND HIS MINISTERS HAVE PROFESSED TO BE SHOCKED BY THE DIRE STATE OF THE SWEDISH ECONOMY, AND THERE IS PROBABLY A CORE OF TRUTH IN THEIR ASSERTION. SOME PUNDITS HAVE SAID THAT IF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS HAD TO PICK A TIME TO HAVE A VACATION FROM POWER, THE CURRENT THREE-YEAR PERIOD, WITH ITS ECONOMIC HEADACHES, WAS POSSIBLY THE IDEAL TIME. IN PRACTICE, THERE IS PROBABLY RATHER LITTLE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS DOING ABOUT THE ECONOMY AND WHAT THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS WOULD BE DOING IF THEY HAD STAYED IN. CERTAINLY THE FALLDIN FORCES ARE APPROACHING THE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS IN A REALISTIC AND RESPONSIBLE WAY THUS FAR, AND WE SEE NO CAUSE FOR UNDUE CONCERN ABOUT SWEDEN'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS.

3. THE FALLDIN GOVERNMENT'S FISCAL-1978 BUDGET PRESENTATION (ANALYZED IN STOCKHOLM 0155) WAS NOT BASED ON SOME NEW
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APPROACH DIFFERENT FROM SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC IDEAS AND CLOSER TO A US OR WEST GERMAN APPROACH. ONE PROMINENT ECONOMIST SAID YOU NEEDED A MAGNIFYING GLASS TO FIND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THIS BUDGET AND ONE THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS MIGHT HAVE SUBMITTED. ALL THE WELFARE ITEMS WERE CONTINUED (SOME WERE EXPANDED), AND THE DECISION FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO BORROW ABROAD WAS THE MOST RADICAL DEPARTURE FROM THE PAST. THE FACT IS THAT TIME DID NOT ALLOW THE WORKING OUT OF A NEW PHILOSOPHY, SO THE NEW NON-SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT NECESSARILY BASED ITS WORK ON THE SOCIALIST PRECEDENTS. DESPITE A CURRENT CLAMOR IN THE PRESS ABOUT THE DANGER OF EXTREMELY HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT (UNOFFICIAL FIGURES AS HIGH AS FIVE PERCENT ARE BEING BANDIED ABOUT), THE BUDGET DEMONSTRATES THE FALLDIN GOVERNMENT'S STEADY FOCUS ON MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT. THIS IN TURN SWINGS ATTENTION TO THE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT WAGE SETTLEMENT TO BE WORKED OUT BY LABOR AND THE EMPLOYERS. LABOR HAS LOST ITS FRIEND IN GOVERNMENT AND HAS HAD ITS BACK UP AGAINST THE EMPLOYERS' RISING COMPLAINTS ABOUT

HIGH LABOR COSTS: THE UNIONS CHARGED BITTERLY THAT THE WORKERS WERE ASKED TO SHOULDER THE WHOLE BURDEN OF RESTORING SWEDEN'S COMPETITIVENESS IN WORLD MARKETS. MEANWHILE THERE HAVE BEEN MANY PRESS ITEMS ABOUT ACTUAL OR THREATENED LAYOFFS OR DISCHARGES, AND THE UNIONS--HIGHLY MISTRUSTFUL OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT ANYWAY--HAVE CHARGED FALLDIN WITH HAVING NO POLICY TO DEAL WITH UNEMPLOYMENT. THE RECRIMINATIONS ON ALL SIDES HAVE NOT MADE SOLUTIONS EASIER, NEEDLESS TO SAY. NEVERTHELESS, WE BELIEVE THE DEEPLY INGRAINED SWEDISH HABITS OF COMPROMISE AND COOPERATION--ESPECIALLY WHEN THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IS SO MANIFESTLY DIFFICULT--WILL EVENTUALLY PRODUCE A REASONABLE WAGE SETTLEMENT AND RESULT IN THE THREE SIDES--LABOR, MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNMENT--WORKING TOLERABLY WELL TOGETHER.

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4. FALLDIN'S HOPES FOR MAINTAINING FULL EMPLOYMENT ARE BASED ON AN EXPANSIONARY FISCAL POLICY. HIS GOVERNMENT MUST BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE PESSIMISM IN THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY REGARDING PROBLEMS IN 1977--NOT ONLY THE EXCESSIVE

INVENTORIES STEMMING FROM THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS' ANTI-UNEMPLOYMENT MEASURES, BUT DEEPER STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS IN MANY IMPORTANT SECTIONS OF SWEDISH INDUSTRY. ALREADY "SICK" COMPANIES LIKE THE NJA STEEL WORKS AND THE GOTaverken SHIPYARDS HAVE BEEN GIVEN MASSIVE SUBSIDIES WHICH PERMIT CONTINUED OPERATION (AND JOBS) BUT DO NOT GUARANTEE THAT THE COMPANIES WILL BECOME PROFITABLE AGAIN. AND RESTRUCTURING, AT LEAST IN THE INITIAL PHASES, MEANS A DECLINE IN EMPLOYMENT, RAISING THAT SPECTER ONCE MORE.

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TIME AND AGAIN, THE OBSERVER OF SWEDISH ECONOMIC PROBLEMS RUNS INTO THE CLICHE THAT "SWEDEN HAS PRICED ITSELF OUT OF THE WORLD MARKET." THAT IS THE CHALLENGE THE FALLDIN GOVERNMENT FACES IN THE THREE YEARS BEFORE THE NEXT SCHEDULED ELECTIONS.

5. STILL AND ALL, FOR 1977, WE DO NOT BELIEVE SWEDEN NEEDS TO BE OVERLY DISHEARTENED ABOUT THE ECONOMY. ASSUMING THAT A RELATIVELY GOOD RECOVERY TAKES PLACE IN THE US AND THE FRG--SOMETHING THE SWedes ARE FERVENTLY HOPING FOR, NEEDLESS TO SAY--SWEDEN SHOULD BE ABLE TO REGAIN SOME OF THE GROUND REPORTEDLY LOST IN MAJOR MARKETS. THE NEED TO BORROW ABROAD IS NOT TOO DISMAL A SIGN: THE SWEDISH CREDIT RATING IS EXCELLENT. AND THE GOVERNMENT CAN CERTAINLY COUNT ON STRONG COOPERATION FROM THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY. IT IS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THE ECONOMY IS THE AREA THAT FALLDIN AND HIS MINISTERS MUST WIN OR LOSE ON-- AND THEY CERTAINLY KNOW IT.

6. FORTUNATELY, THE DRAMA OF THE SWEDISH ECONOMY WILL BE PLAYED OUT AGAINST A BACKDROP OF POLITICAL STABILITY. THE CENTER, LIBERAL AND MODERATE PARTIES STILL DISAGREE ON SEVERAL IMPORTANT QUESTIONS--ESPECIALLY NUCLEAR ENERGY AND MILITARY SPENDING--BUT THEY ARE OBVIOUSLY LEARNING TO WORK AS A TROIKA, AND WE SEE NO REASON TO THINK THE COALITION WILL BREAK DOWN. NOR DO WE SEE ANY LIKELIHOOD OF CHANGE IN PARTY LEADERS, ALL OF WHOM SEEM SECURE. BUT WHILE WE SEE EVIDENCE THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT IS LEARNING TO GOVERN SUCCESSFULLY, IT MUST RECKON WITH AN IMAGE OF INACTIVITY OR LACK OF INITIATIVE. MANY SWedes HAVE FELT RELIEF THAT THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ONWARD PROGRESS WAS HALTED; BUT AFTER A WHILE THEY WILL BE EXPECTING THE NEW GOVERNMENT TO OFFER A NEW PATH INSTEAD, AND SO FAR THIS HAS NOT REALLY BEEN DONE. THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, IN THEIR UNFAMILIAR ROLE OF OPPOSITION, SO FAR HAVE BEEN OPPORTUNISTIC AND STINGILY ACCUSATORY. PALME HAS BLISTERED FALLDIN

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REPEATEDLY FOR ALLEGEDLY DEFAULTING ON PROMISES ABOUT THE NUCLEAR ISSUE. AND IRONICALLY, PALME ATTACKED THE GOVERNMENT FOR PRESENTING AN OVERLY EXPANSIONARY BUDGET, SPEAKING UP FOR HIGHER TAXES, CUTS IN GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES AND REDUCED FOREIGN BORROWING. WITH SOME 50 PERCENT OF THE VOTE STILL BEHIND HIM (COUNTING HIS COMMUNIST ALLIES), PALME WILL SURELY MAINTAIN A SHAP SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PROFILE; BUT SOME OBSERVERS HOPE THAT AS HE BECOMES MORE ACCUSTOMED TO HIS NEW PLACE, HE WILL MOVE EVENTUALLY TO A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE STANCE.

7. AS REGARDS FOREIGN POLICY, THERE SEEMS TO BE LITTLE HEAT, OR EVEN INTEREST, EITHER WITHIN THE COALITION GOVERNMENT OR EVEN WITH THE OPPOSITION. ALL SIGNS ARE THAT FALLDIN PERSONALLY HAS VERY LITTLE INTEREST IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS OR TIME FOR IT; HE KNOWS THE ECONOMY IS CRUCIAL FOR HIM. WHILE FOREIGN MINISTER SODER IS STARTING TO DO SOME FOREIGN TRAVELING--AND THE GOVERNMENT HAS EXPRESSED INTEREST IN A POSSIBLE INVITATION FOR HER TO VISIT WASHINGTON--MOST OBSERVERS EXPECT FALLDIN HIMSELF TO DO LITTLE OR NO TRAVELING ABROAD. NORDIC AND WEST EUROPEAN TIES CONTINUE TO BE EMPHASIZED BY FOREIGN AFFAIRS TYPES, AND THE NEW GOVERNMENT HAS CONTINUED THE INTEREST IN AFRICA BEGUN BY PALME (MINISTER FOR AID ULLSTEN WILL VISIT EAST AFRICA IN FEBRUARY AND MRS. SODER PLANS AN AFRICAN TRIP IN THE FALL). DIFFERENCES AMONG COALITION MEMBERS--THE MODERATES WANT AID TO CUBA STOPPED IMMEDIATELY, THE LIBERALS TEND TO BE PRO-ISRAELI--HAVE BEEN CONTAINED OR RECONCILED, GENERALLY BY CONTINUING THE POLICIES OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS. IN FOREIGN POLICY, CONTINUITY WILL GO ON BEING THE MOST VISIBLE THING.

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8. IN THE MILITARY-SECURITY AREA, 1977 SHOULD SEE A SLIGHT IMPROVEMENT IN SWEDISH RESOLVE TO MAINTAIN A HIGH LEVEL OF DEFENSE READINESS. THE PROPOSED BUDGET CALLS FOR HIGHER DEFENSE SPENDING, REVERSING A FIVE-YEAR TREND OF DECREASED MILITARY CAPABILITY, AND THE SWEDISH MILITARY ARE DEMONSTRATING NOTICEABLY MORE CONFIDENCE IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT. UNDER THE PROPOSED BUDGET, THE NAVY SHOULD BE ABLE TO PROCURE NINE NEW MINESWEEPERS, THREE NACKEN SUBMARINES, CONTINUE THE PROGRAM FOR SIX NEW-TYPE A-17 SUBMARINES, REPLACE OLD TORPEDO BOATS WITH THE NEW JAGUAR, AND BEGIN EQUIPPING THE SPICA BOATS WITH SURFACE-TO-SURFACE MISSILES. THE ARMY WOULD PROCURE THE IMPROVED HAWK AND TOW MISSILE SYSTEM AND LIGHT AND MEDIUM

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HELICOPTERS. ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE, AIR FORCE AND AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY SOURCES DO NOT BELIEVE THE PROPOSED BUDGET INCLUDES SUFFICIENT FUNDS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE B3LA LIGHT ATTACK AIRCRAFT. THE DECISION--LARGELY POLITICAL--ON THIS CONTROVERSIAL AIRPLANE HAD ALREADY BEEN POSTPONED UNTIL FALL; NOW ADDITIONAL FUNDS WILL ALSO HAVE TO BE VOTED, IF THE GOVERNMENT ELECTS TO PROCEED WITH THE PROGRAM. THOSE IN FAVOR OF B3LA DEVELOPMENT ARGUE THAT THE PLANE IS NOT ONLY NEEDED BY THE AIR FORCE FOR THE LATE 1980'S BUT IS ALSO ESSENTIAL TO SUSTAIN SAAB'S ENGINEERING DESIGN CAPABILITY FOR DEVELOPING ADVANCED FIGHTER AIRCRAFT FOR THE 1990'S.

9. THE FIELD OF ENERGY WILL CONTINUE TO PREOCCUPY THE FALLDIN GOVERNMENT THIS YEAR. THE NUCLEAR ENERGY QUESTION PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT PART IN FALLDIN'S ELECTORAL VICTORY AND HARDLY A DAY WILL PASS IN 1977 WITHOUT SOME PUBLIC REFERENCE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIVITIES IN THIS

CONTROVERSIAL AREA. AS A FIRST STEP IN "STOPPING SWEDEN'S MARCH INTO A NUCLEAR SOCIETY, "FALLDIN WILL PUSH THROUGH THE RIKSDAG HIS "CONDITIONS BILL" DEFINING CRITERIA (ON NUCLEAR WASTE MANAGEMENT AND FUEL REPROCESSING) WHICH THE POWER COMPANIES MUST MEET BY OCTOBER 1 IF THEY WANT TO CONTINUE BUILDING SEVERAL NEW PLANTS. FURTHER BASIC DECISIONS IN THE NUCLEAR IMBROGLIO AWAIT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE RECENTLY APPOINTED ROYAL COMMISSION ON ENERGY, WHICH WILL REPORT IN THE SPRING OF 1978. FALLDIN HAS HINTED THAT IF THE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE UNACCEPTABLE TO HIM, HE WILL GO FOR A REFERENDUM. MEANWHILE, IN LINE WITH CAMPAIGN PROMISES, THE MAJOR EMPHASES IN THIS YEAR'S ENERGY EFFORT WILL BE ON THE MORE EFFICIENT USE OF ENERGY IN INDUSTRY AND HOUSING. THE ENERGY FIELD IS ONE WHICH OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXTENSIVE US-SWEDISH COLLABORATION. (AS ONE EXAMPLE, THE SWedes, WITH A HIGHER PER CAPITA GNP THAN OURS, GET BY WITH ONLY 60 PERCENT OF THE PER CAPITA ENERGY EXPENDITURE: MAYBE WE HAVE SOMETHING TO

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LEARN HERE.)

10. AS FOR US INTERESTS, PERHAPS MOST OF WHAT THE EMBASSY HAS TO SAY IN THAT REGARD SHOULD BE STATED IN THE ANNUAL ASSESSMENT. IN THIS PREVIEW OF 1977, AT LEAST IT MIGHT BE SAID THAT WE EXPECT THE RELATIVELY BETTER TREATMENT OF THE US IN THE SWEDISH MEDIA TO CONTINUE, AND THE GENERAL CLIMATE OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS SHOULD IMPROVE FURTHER UNDER THE NEW GOVERNMENTS IN EACH COUNTRY. THE IRRITATINGLY SELF-CONFIDENT PALME GOVERNMENT DOUND TIME TO INTEREST ITSELF IN MOST AREAS OF THE WORLD, BUT THE FALLDIN GOVERNMENT SHOWS EVERY SIGN OF CONCENTRATING INWARD. SOME ARE SAYING ALREADY THAT FALLDIN'S WORLD MAY INCLUDE EUROPE ON THE HORIZON, BUT FOR MOST PRACTICAL PURPOSES IT IS SWEDEN PLUS HER NORDIC NEIGHBORS. THIS IS AN EXAGGERATION, BUT THE PERIODSOF THE SWEDISH ECONOMY WILL SURELY SERVE IN 1977 TO HELP KEEP SWEDEN'S ATTENTION FOCUSED UPON HERSELF. THIS NOT ONLY MEANS LESS OPPORTUNITY FOR FRICTION WITH THE US, IT ALSO MEANS MORE IMPULSION TOWARDS SWEDISH COOPERATION WITH US IN A NUMBER OF AREAS.

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